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ABSTRACT

This document discusses educational assessment and accountability in current educational reform efforts and the implications for students with disabilities. A preface addresses common educational reforms, new laws promoting education reform, and how today's reforms fit with special education. The paper then describes three types of assessment: individual assessment, large-scale assessment, and performance-based assessment. The historical exclusion of students with disabilities from large scale assessment programs at the national, state, and local levels, and the reasons for this exclusion are highlighted. The need for accommodations to enable students with disabilities to participate in future assessments is also discussed. The document closes with a discussion on what can be done to maximize the participation and accommodations for students with disabilities in large scale assessment. Strategies include: planning and developing assessments that ensure accountability for all students, finding out if statewide assessments include students with disabilities, using an alternative assessment for some students, and reporting the assessment results of all students. Action steps that can be taken at the school district level and action steps for Individuals Education Programs to ensure participation and accommodation of students with disabilities in the local and state level assessment are also provided. (Contains 15 references.) (CR)

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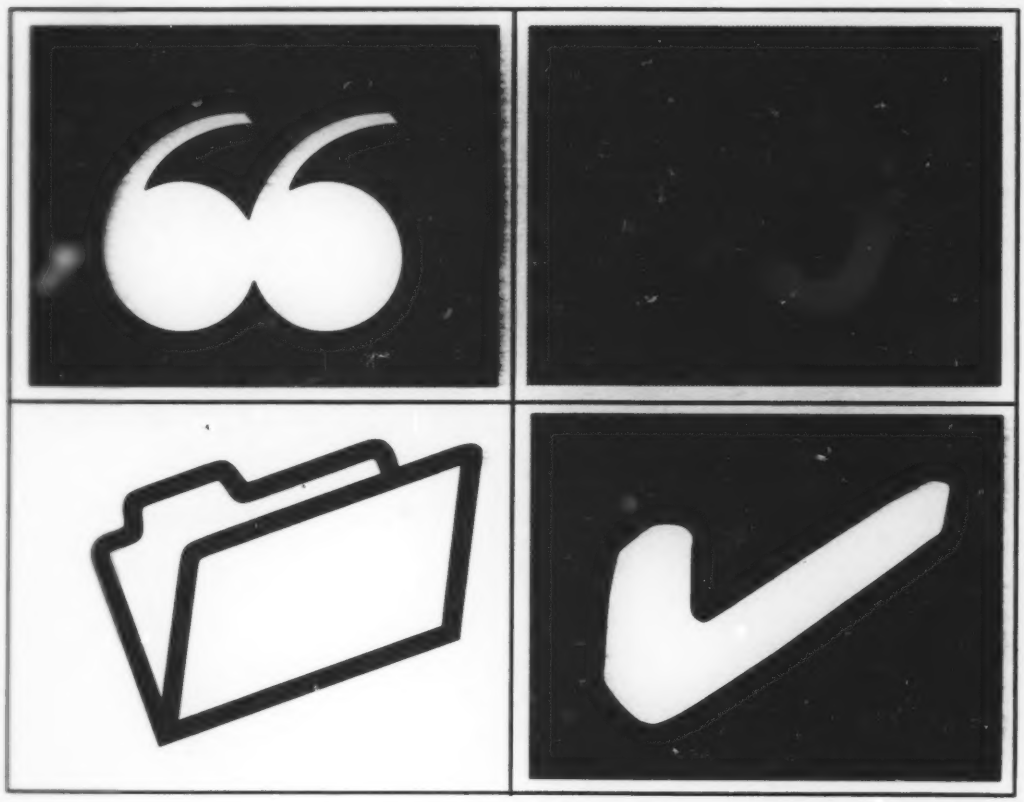
Opening the Door

to Educational Reform



Understanding Educational Assessment and Accountability

EC 305907

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Preface

What is Educational Reform All About?

Reform usually means "change for the better." Today, our education system is undergoing major changes in response to concerns about its adequacy. Why are we so concerned?

- In some areas, international comparisons suggest that U.S. students do not perform as well as students in many other countries.
- Colleges and universities are having to give remedial work to more and more students before they are ready for college-level classes.
- U.S. businesses have complained that high school graduates in our country do not have the skills needed to be good workers in today's global economy.

While people may disagree about whether these statements are true, most people do agree that we should support our educational system and, at the same time, push for it to improve. Thus, the American public is always interested in changing education for the better. However, policymakers, educators, and parents alike are pushing harder than usual for reforms in education. This is happening in many states and across the nation.

Educational reform has implications for students with disabilities, especially now when the focus is on producing workers who can help the United States compete in a global economy. Too often, students with disabilities are not considered in discussions of educational reform. Yet, we want all individuals to be contributing members of our society, including those with disabilities. We want our educational system to be **accountable** for all children.

What are Some Common Educational Reforms?

There are many reforms in the news today. Most of them are said to be "systemic" -- occurring throughout the education system. Systemic reform can occur in local schools, school districts, or states. You may have heard about site-based management, cooperative learning, teaming, collaboration, and other reform strategies. While many reforms are being promoted, different people push different reforms because they disagree about which are the best approaches. Yet there remains a strong push for schools to help students learn to a high academic levels -- to **challenging standards**. Schools show that their students meet these challenging standards through assessments that now are more varied and real-world based, and that results in richer information about student learning. These efforts are now included in several federal education laws and in the education laws of many states. They are themes that have significant implications for students with disabilities.

Shaded states have set new standards and/or developed new assessments since 1990.

What New Laws Promote Educational Reform?

Three federal education laws enacted in 1993 and 1994 are important steps toward helping states in their reform efforts: *Goals 2000: Educate America Act, Improving America's Schools Act*, and the *School to Work Opportunities Act*.

***Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (Public Law 103-227).** *Goals 2000* was signed on March 31, 1994. It provides money to states for school reform. It encourages setting high standards of learning for students and using better assessments to evaluate progress toward meeting the standards. *Goals 2000* is very clear in its definition of "all students" and in the requirement that students with disabilities be considered in all aspects of educational reform.

Goals 2000 identifies eight national education goals that are designed to include **all** students. These goals are to be reached by the year 2000:

(1) SCHOOL READINESS -- All children in America will start school ready to learn.

(2) SCHOOL COMPLETION -- The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

(3) STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND CITIZENSHIP -- All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy.

(4) TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT -- The Nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.

(5) MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE -- United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.

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(6) ADULT LITERACY AND LIFELONG LEARNING -- Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

(7) SAFE, DISCIPLINED, AND ALCOHOL- AND DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS -- Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

(8) PARENTAL PARTICIPATION -- Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

"All students" is specifically defined in *Goals 2000* as "students . . . from a broad range of backgrounds and circumstances, including . . . students . . . with disabilities, limited-English proficiency, [dropouts], migratory students . . ., and academically talented students and children"

Improving America's Schools Act **(Public Law 103-382).** This used to be the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, but was revised and signed into law on October 20, 1994. *IASA* authorizes funding for Title I programs (what used to be called Chapter 1 programs).

Title I programs assist students by providing extra help in math and reading. If states have already developed new "challenging standards" in math and reading in order to receive *Goals 2000* monies, they can use those same standards to get additional Title I money. If a state is not trying to qualify for *Goals 2000* monies, they still have to develop new challenging standards in reading and math to get Title I, and *IASA* funds. Like *Goals 2000* the *Improving America's Schools Act* clarifies that *IASA* money is for all students.

The *Improving America's Schools Act* promotes schoolwide reform strategies that:

(i) Provide opportunities for all children to meet the State's proficient and advanced levels of student performance

(ii) Are based on effective means of improving the achievement of children

(iii) Use effective instructional strategies, . . . that (I) increase the amount and quality of learning time, . . .(II) include strategies for meeting the educational needs of historically underserved populations, . . .

(iv) (I) address the needs of all children in the school . . . (II) address how the school will determine if such needs have been met . . . .

(vii) Are consistent with, and designed to implement, the State and local improvement plans, if any, approved under title III of Goals 2000: Educate America Act.

School to Work Opportunities Act **(Public Law 103-239).** The critical time of transition from school to work is the target of this national education law, signed on May 4, 1994. The intent of the law is to help schools combine classroom lessons and workplace training. As with *Goals 2000* and *IASA*, this law makes it clear that students with disabilities are to be included in the initiatives undertaken under its funding.

The purposes of the *School to Work Opportunities Act* are:

(1) to establish a national framework within which all States can create statewide School-to-Work Opportunities systems

(2) to facilitate the creation of a universal, high-quality school-to-work transition system that enables youths in the United States to identify and navigate paths to productive and progressively more rewarding roles in the workplace

(3) to utilize workplaces as active learning environments in the educational process by making employers joint partners with educators in providing opportunities for all students to participate in high-quality, work-based learning experiences

(4) to use Federal funds under this Act as venture capital, to underwrite the initial costs of planning and establishing statewide School-to-Work Opportunities systems that will be maintained with other Federal, State, and local resources . . . .

(11) to motivate all youths, including low-achieving youths, school dropouts, and youths with disabilities, to stay in or return to school or a classroom setting and strive to succeed, by providing enriched learning experiences and assistance in obtaining good jobs and continuing their education in postsecondary educational institutions

(12) to increase opportunities for minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities, by enabling individuals to prepare for careers that are not traditional for their race, gender, or disability

In the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, the term "all students" means "both male and female students from a broad range of backgrounds and circumstances, including . . . students with disabilities . . .

How Do Today's Reforms Fit with Special Education?

We are beginning to see some of the ways today's school reforms affect students who receive special education services. Before this, special education services were evaluated in terms of the extent to which school districts offering those services complied with requirements of special education law. Compliance meant that students were assessed in a timely manner, that services were provided in an appropriate setting, and that the need for services and the type of services were re-evaluated annually. Special education services were not evaluated on the basis of results achieved by the students receiving services.

The compliance-based approach to special education evaluation is different from the results-based approach being pursued in the general education reforms of today. It is no longer acceptable to simply ask "are students getting the services indicated on their Individual Education Program?" We must ask "are they learning?" Therein lies the difference between compliance-based and results-based approaches to reform. Reforms of today, the ones that are to bring us into the 21st century, are based on **world-class standards** and **assessments**.

Many questions are raised when we talk about systemic reforms and students with disabilities. For example:

- Can students with disabilities be included in general education reforms while still preserving what is "special" in special education?

- Can we focus more on the results of education and still protect compliance and procedural safeguards?

- Can education be individualized to the needs of students and still be oriented toward the achievement of high standards?

- Are there assessments that can measure the progress of students with disabilities in the same way that they measure the progress of students without disabilities?

These and many other questions deserve discussion and resolution in a way that ensures that students with disabilities are not left behind.

Educational standards are touted repeatedly in discussions of educational reform. We need our schools to reach higher standards of excellence, so that students can be held to challenging, world-class standards. What does this mean? What are the implications of standards for students with disabilities? These and other questions are the focus of this document.

Educational Assessment and Accountability

What is Assessment?

What is assessment? It is the process of measuring learning against a set of standards. A recent development in assessment is standards-based assessment. Standards-based assessment is assessment of student progress relative to a set of state, district, or national standards. Assessment and the notion of using new forms of assessment are integral parts of new legislation such as *Goals 2000* and *Improving America's Schools Acts* (*IASA*). One of the characteristics most apparent in current school reforms is a shift from documenting the process of educating students to measuring the results of the educational process. Policymakers, legislators, school administrators, and the general public want to know the extent to which education in America is working.

What is Accountability?

At each level of governance, educators are striving to document educational effectiveness, and many different kinds of accountability practices are being used. Accountability typically is defined as a systemic method to assure those inside and outside the educational system that schools are moving in desired directions.

The primary way in which national, state, and local educators currently make accountability decisions for students with disabilities is through child count and compliance monitoring. Local school districts and cooperatives receive dollars based on numbers of students identified as students with disabilities. Some states employ a weighted-pupil funding. That is, different amounts of money are awarded to schools based on the students' severity of disabilities. Funding may be removed as a consequence to the noncompliance with special education laws. Compliance with state or national policy on the delivery of services to students with disabilities is both the source of funding and monitoring of procedures for special education.

It is clear that this compliance-based procedure does not look at the important question "Is the student learning?" Rather it addresses the question "Is the student getting the services written on the IEP?" Therein lies the real issue of accountability and assessment.

Putting into place legal requirements was a logical first step twenty years ago, since many students with disabilities were denied access to educational programs or were underserved. However, it is no longer enough to base our investment in special education solely on the number of IEPs that have been completed on time, the statistics of special education class sizes, or the description of services. Although these procedures are important, they are but a means to an end.

Accountability is a more encompassing term than assessment. It can include more than the collection of data via tests, record reviews, and other performance assessments. Rather, a system is accountable for all students when it makes sure all students count or participate in the evaluation program of the educational system. This does not mean that all students take the same test, but rather that all students' learning and progress are accounted for and included when reports about the educational system are made.

Why Assess?

The new emphasis on achieving higher educational standards has moved educators beyond the issues of access and procedural compliance to a more critical issue. How can we improve individual student performance in ways that will lead to each student having a more independent adult life as a productive member of the community?

Assessment does not mean just paper and pencil testing. Other kinds of assessment include assessment of performance, observations of role plays, portfolios or collections of student work, administration of questionnaires, evaluations of projects, interviews with students, and reviews of records.

Educational assessments are conducted for a variety of reasons. In schools, assessments commonly are used for screening purposes, for determining eligibility for programs, for evaluation (including classroom feedback for students and teachers), and for program planning. For the purpose of this paper the following three types of assessment will be discussed briefly:

- Individual Assessment
- Large-scale Assessment
- Performance-based Assessment

Individual Assessment, such as psycho-educational assessment, is focused on exploring discrepancies that exist between what the learner knows and can do and the expected performance within a developmental-age range, curricula or social context. Individual assessments are administered one to one with an assessor and student. Typically these assessments are for the purpose of determining eligibility for remedial and special education programming. Often, individual assessment may serve the purpose of screening for strengths and weaknesses in areas of concern.

Large Scale Assessment is the major type of assessment used to account for educational results for America's students. Simply defined, large scale assessment is a form of testing in which large groups of students are tested across a broad domain, in a relatively short period of time. Large scale assessments have traditionally been administered under uniform conditions so that the results can be compared across

groups of students within districts, states, and the nation. You many recall taking a test in school with a large number of students, either in the grade level or content area. Large scale assessment is used at the national level, the state level, and sometimes the local level.

The primary functions of state assessment programs include:

- Accountability
- Instructional Improvement
- Program Evaluation
- Student Diagnosis
- High School Graduation

Most large scale assessments focus on either system accountability (describing educational status) or selection of students (for example, SATs, ACTs and other college entrance tests) and awarding of diplomas. They may be used to push for instructional change, but generally are not useful for individualzed decisions about instruciton or diagnosis.

At the national level, we have a large-scale assessment called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as our nation's "report card." NAEP is the primary survey of educational achievement of American school age students and changes in achievement across time. NAEP was initiated in 1969 to assess achievement of national samples of students in core subject areas.

Performance-based Assessment is considered by many to be a new form of assessment. Current educational standards and goals being defined by states are calling for students to demonstrate higher level thinking skills such as making judgments, solving problems, reasoning, communicating for multiple purposes, gathering information from multiple sources, and making contributions to collaborative efforts. These skills would be difficult to measure using traditional assessments.

Performance-based assessment is a multi-faceted approach to measuring knowledge and competencies in a way that taps higher order thinking skills as well as content knowledge. Performance-based assessments take a variety of forms ranging from essays, open-ended problems, hands-on science to the production of art work, portfolios of student work and computer simulations.

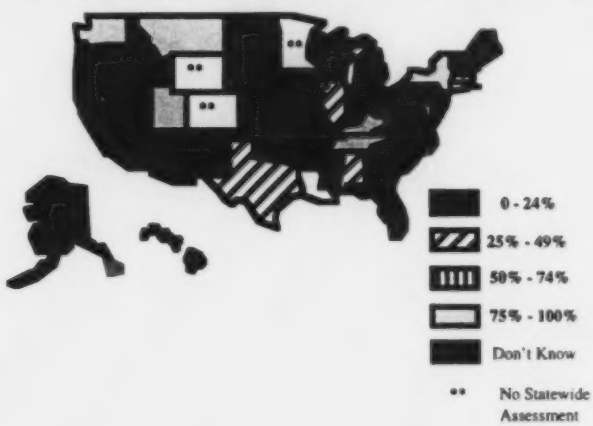
What Do We Know About Large Scale Assessment and Students with Disabilities?

What do we expect young Americans to know and be able to do when they have completed their education? How do we assess the accomplishment of those skills? How will schools be held accountable for attainment of those skills? All these

questions appear quite logical in their format, especially in light of *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. In this law, a very specific definition of "all students" is provided. It includes students with disabilities. Tragically, it has been these students who have been left out of school reform activities in the past. If the purpose of large scale assessment is to describe the status of students in the educational system, why would any child be excluded? One implication of this exclusion practice is that students who are left out of assessments tend not to be considered during reform efforts. Educators, parents, policymakers and the general public want and need to know the extent to which all students, including those with disabilities, are profiting from their educational programs and schooling experiences.

We know that students with disabilities have been excluded to an unreasonable extent from large scale assessment programs at the national, state, and local levels. At the national level it has been demonstrated that the rate of excluding students with disabilities is about 50% in assessments like NAEP. NAEP is also used to provide state-level information on the performance of students. However, students with disabilities have been excluded from state NAEP assessments at rates varying from 33 percent to 87 percent. States also implement a variety of other assessments some of which are commercially published norm-referenced tests, but most of which are assessments develped by state to measure state standards. These assessments typically focus on academic achievement in areas such as reading comprehension, math computation, or math problem solving (for example, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, California Test of Basic Skills, Stanford Achievement Test).

Estimated Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities in Statewide Assessments Used for School or District Accountability



Source: Taken from State Special Education Outcomes (1994).

While there has been improvement over the past few years in the knowledge that states have about the number of students with disabilities included in assessment, it is still relatively few states that are able to report the number of students with disabilities included in their statewide assessments. With the increasing use of state

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assessments, and the increased emphasis placed on them through recent legislation, it is important to recognize the consequences for current assessment practice.

While the exclusion rates of students with disabilities from assessments may be new information to some, the struggle for inclusion of these students at the classroom level is more well-known. Today, many students with disabilities are benefiting and meeting with success in the general education setting, along a continuum of service delivery. The adaptations in curriculum and teaching for students with disabilities have enabled them to be successful in the general education setting.

So why should we be concerned about their inclusion or participation in assessments? Because out of sight is out of mind. In today's educational reforms, many issues are being considered and reviewed. Individuals excluded from assessments are not likely to be considered in policy decisions that affect all students. Students with disabilities must be considered and included in the process of assessment of what they know and can do. Whether you support classroom-based inclusion or not, students with disabilities must be part of school district, state and national accountability system.

Related to Large Scale Assessments and Students With Disabilities

High Stakes versus Low Stakes. There are unanticipated consequences when students with disabilities are excluded from assessment. Such exclusion can lead to, or might be a result of, the belief on the part of educators that they are not responsible for the education of students with disabilities. It can also lead to lowered expectations for students with disabilities. If students are not tested they become invisible. If districts and states do not include students with disabilities in testing, then they tend to not include them in instruction.

The idea of mandating districts and states to include all students in the assessment of standards and outcomes introduces the concept of "high stakes" versus "low stakes" assessment. These terms refer to the consequences of the assessments. When the consequences of a test have a significant impact on a person or organization, the test is called "high stakes." The consequences of assessment are important to consider because as the stakes of the assessment increase, decisions about who participates and the ways in which they do often change. When assessment is for "high stakes," students who are expected to do less well often areexcluded from the assessment and/or the reporting of the results.

When assessment is "high stakes" for students (for example, the results determine whether the student graduates), it is extremely important to consider participation and accommodation guidelines and policies. Exclusion from these assessments can mean that the student is deprived of a desired property, such as the high school diploma. On the other hand, if exemption from an assessment will ensure that the student will be awarded the high school diploma, it is not uncommon for an

increasing number of students to be referred by teachers and parents for special education evaluation in part, for eligibility, so they can be exempted from testing, but still receive the diploma by default.

> **New York:** An unintended consequence of coupling high stakes assessment with exclusion is nonpromotion from one grade to the next, referral to special education, and placement in more restrictive placements. An elementary school received favorable press releases and a national award of excellence, based in part on high scores on the state's third grade test. A study challenged the test results of the state's periodically given examinations. The district reported that 96% of third grade students consistently passed the benchmark test. However, findings revealed that the percentage was inflated because many of the nine-year-olds (the typical third-grade age) had been retained in second grade or placed in special education. In some instances the percentage of students passing dropped into the mid 60s.
>
> Zlatos (1994). Don't Test, don't tell (see resources)

Participation. Students with disabilities have been excluded from assessment for a variety of reasons:

- **lack** of written policy **guidelines**
- **vagueness** of guideline wording that leads to different interpretation and implementation;
- **lack of successful monitoring** of the extent to which the guidelines are followed;
- test administration that **does not include students who are in separate schools or who are not in graded programs** (for example, residential placements, juvenile homes, hospitalized or home-bound students);
- the **lack of available accommodations** in the actual tests themselves as well as the procedures;
- **incentives** created by the desire to have a school or state look good in comparison to others in the state or nation; and
- **humane motivations**, such as lessening the emotional distress to the student who is either not expected to do well or who does not perform well under test conditions (for example, a student who is anxiety ridden).

The National Center on Educational Outcomes for Students with Disabilities (NCEO) found that exclusion of students with disabilities occurs at three points in the assessment process:

- At the time of development

- During administration
- When reporting results

Students with disabilities often are excluded **during the development** of assessment items. As a result, assessments may not have appropriate items for students with disabilities. One of the most common omissions is not having enough items that accommodate the diversity and the range of skills that exist among students with disabilities.

Terms used by districts and states for the concept of **participation** (or nonparticipation) include:		
Eligibility	Exclusion	Exemption
Inclusion	Excused	

A second point of exclusion is **during the administration** of the assessment. This is the kind of exclusion most people know about. Parents may be encouraged to keep students home so that they don't have to suffer through a test that it is assumed they will fail. Certain students may be pulled out of the classroom to watch a movie or field trips may be scheduled during the time the state assessment is given. The stories are endless.

A third point of exclusion occurs when the **reports of results** are prepared. Often, the scores of students with disabilities are left out. This is due to a variety of reasons. The foremost being the concern that the performance of students with disabilities on these assessments will skew or throw off the overall results of the assessment. Even more common, the scores of students with disabilities who do participate cannot be separated from those of other students. Therefore there is an absence of information on the performance or test results for this group of students.

Accommodation. The variability in rates of participation of students with disabilities in assessments is tied to guidelines that are used for making decisions about who participates. High rates of exclusion are often directly related to whether accommodations are allowed and provided for students with disabilities who need them, and to the nature of the accommodations that are used.

There are a number of technical and implementation issues of test measurement that revolve around the use of accommodations and their effect on test scores. These require additional research and must be solved if we are to have a fully inclusive assessment system.

However, for now, by law, students with disabilities have a right to participate in assessment, and have a right to have their scores and performances considered when policy and accountability decisions are made.

Terms used by districts and states for the concept of **accommodation** include:		
Adaptation	Mediation	Modification

Alteration

Distinctions between the meanings of the terms are not worthy of discussion because they are used to mean the same thing as often as they are to mean different things. It is mimportatn to find out how they are used in your state nad district.

Decisions About Who Participates and How They Participate. For some students, meaningful participation in assessments requires the use of testing accommodations. States vary considerably in the policies they may have for both making decisions about the participation of students with disabilities in assessment, and deciding the kinds of accommodations and adaptations that are used during assessments. Although there seems to be increasing awareness of the need to provide testing accommodations for students with disabilities, there is no consensus on when it is appropriate to make accommodations or on what kinds of accommodations should be made.

Many state assessment guidelines defer decisions to the team that develops the student's IEP. Other state guidelines recommend that participation and accommodation decisions be based on the student's category of disability. Some states have made such decisions based on the percentage of time the student spends in the general education curriculum.

Each of these options is problematic. Leaving the decision to the IEP team is problematic because the team often allows too much slippage in the team decision-making process. It is not uncommon for any and all students with IEPs to be excluded from testing.

In some states, the decision about whether a student's assessment results are reported is based primarily on the amount of time the student is in the general education classrooms. For example, this approach (modified by the concept of partial testing) is used in North Dakota:

1. *If the student is mainstreamed in 50 percent or more of the core courses being tested, the student should be tested. The student's test results are to be included in class, grade, district, and state averages.*

2. *If the student is mainstreamed in less than 50 percent of the core courses, the student may or may not be tested depending on the students IEP. If the student is tested, the student's test results are not to be included in class, grade, district, and state averages.*

3. *If a student who has an IEP does not take all sections of the test, or if the student takes the test under other than standard testing procedures, the student's test results should not be included in the class, grade, district, and state averages.*

(North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 1994, p.1)

Using a category of disability to determine a student's participation in assessments is not only discriminatory but presumptuous at best. Are we saying that all students with disabilities are not capable of taking an assessment, even with accommodation?

There are 13 federal categories of students with disabilities, and within each category students demonstrate a wide range of skill and ability. It is estimated that as much as 85 percent of the nearly 5 million students who are now considered eligible for special education services (i.e., they have IEPs) could take large scale state and national assessments, some with and some without accommodations. These students include many of the students with learning disabilities, emotional or behavioral disabilities, and some with mental retardation. Are all of these students to be excluded from assessment simply based on a category or label?

Using the percentage of time spent in the general education curriculum to decide on assessment participation also is a questionable practice. How does the percentage of time reflect the student's instructional program, level of skill development, or ability? There are too many other considerations that enter into general education programming decisions to use this criterion to determine assessment participation.

There are many factors that enter into participation and accommodation decisions. A better indicator than any of the previously identified criteria would be the alignment between what the test is intended to measure and the curriculum the student is learning. The type of curriculum rather than the setting or category of disability should be the factor that determines the nature of the assessment. Rather than referring to the IEP it is better practice to identify skills needed to take the assessment and then teach them if need be. This is **not** "teaching to the test," as some would argue; rather, it is teaching the skills needed to take the test.

Many of us have taken tests that have tapped our reading comprehension skills (e.g., understanding the directions) rather than our knowledge of the test content. A checklist of factors to consider in making participation and accommodation decisions could be used as a guide. An example of a checklist that could be used for a reading assessment is provided here.

Reading Assessment Participation Checklist

Student Name _____ School _____

Section I: Assessment Requirements

Directions: Answer the following questions for the student identified above. Be sure to complete all sections of the worksheet.

1. Can the student work independently?	[ ] YES	[ ] NO
2. Can the student work with 25 to 30 other students in a quiet setting?	[ ] YES	[ ] NO
3. Can the student work continuously for 20 to 30 minute periods.	[ ] YES	[ ] NO
4. Can the student listen and follow oral directions given by an adult or an audio tape?	[ ] YES	[ ] NO
5. Can the student use paper and pencil to write short-answer or paragraph length responses to open ended questions?	[ ] YES	[ ] NO

Section II: Testing Accommodations and Adaptations

Directions: If the answer "**NO**" is given to any of questions 1 through 6 above, the students should be given an appropriate accommodation based on state guidelines.

Directions: Based on the above questions, select the appropriate decision about participation listed below. ***When in doubt, always choose in favor of the student participating in the statewide assessment.***

[ ] The student should participate in the statewide reading assessment without special accommodations.
[ ] The student should participate in the statewide assessment with appropriate accommodations.
[ ] The student should be given a different assessment.

It is important to identify at least one potential drawback of the curriculum-based decision. If the student's curriculum is inappropriate, then making an assessment decision based on the curriculum is also inappropriate. For example, if the student is excluded from science class because scheduling makes the science class time the best time to provide resource room services, it is really inappropriate to exclude the student from the science assessment. The student should be receiving science instruction, and should take an assessment that accurately reflects the knowledge that the student has received from science instruction (or, more accurately, from lack of science instruction).

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What Can Be Done to Maximize the Participation and Accommodation of Students with Disabilities in Large Scale Assessment?

Perhaps the first issue to address when considering a student's participation in large scale assessment is whether there is agreement among teachers, parents, and the student about the goal of the student's education. If the goal is for the student to follow and complete the same general course of instruction and to achieve the same outcomes and standards as other students, then the student should be required to demonstrate attainment of the same goals. However, it may be that the student will need to demonstrate the goals in different ways, with some kind of accommodation in procedures, but meeting the same basic requirements. All students, including students with disabilities need to be continually assessed on their own specific growth. In large scale assessment of program and system accountability, students with disabilities may require accommodations similar to what they require or receive during instruction and individual assessment. By providing these accommodations we not only increase the participation of students with disabilities in large scale assessment and accountability systems, we level the playing field for all students.

There are three types of students with disabilities in regard to assessment. Those who

(1) are able to take the large scale assessment without any accommodation

(2) are able to take the large scale assessment with accommodations provided

(3) will need to take a different or alternative assessment

Many students with disabilities can be included in statewide assessments with very minor accommodations that will not interfere with test validity (for example, testing in a separate setting). Others can be included in statewide assessments with more significant accommodation (for example, Braille, extended time for test taking). It is important to begin to consider these options as first line approaches to the question of the participation of students with disabilities in assessments.

Another consideration is in the area of accommodations that are used during classroom instruction. Accommodations used during classroom instruction provide the student equal opportunity to learn the required material, not to provide an unfair advantage. Therefore, these same accommodations used during instruction should be provided during assessment. Accommodations should not be new to the student or introduced at the time of test administration.

It is important to remember not all students with disabilities will need accommodations during assessment. For those who do, it is important that there be

alignment or flow between instructional accommodation and accommodations needed for assessment. By providing accommodations to students who need them, the number of students with disabilities who can take large scale assessments is increased. Among possible accommodations for instruction and assessment are ones shown on the next page.

Some accommodations and adaptations raise questions about the technical characteristics of assessments. The argument is that the use of accommodations during assessment produces test results that do not represent the true ability of the student. These concerns are valid and important in the efforts to include all students in state and national assessment programs. Currently, test developers and researchers are studying the effects of accommodation on test performance.

A final thought on the issue of accommodation revolves around the ultimate test our children and students take -- living in today's society. There are many accommodations allowed in the community setting for work and daily living. Some people believe that nothing less than those accommodations allowed in the "real world" should be provided students in the educational world.

An Action Plan for Assessment: What Needs to Happen?

In less than a decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of attention that our nation pays to assessments given both in and outside of the classroom. Assessment and accountability have moved to the forefront of restructuring efforts. It is imperative that students with disabilities be considered in the process of planning and development as states strive to rework existing curricular frameworks and corresponding assessments. The development of new assessments is not only an enormous undertaking, but one that is multi-faceted. Building a system that is accountable for all students should be one of the top goals of our education system. If we begin our planning and development of assessments with the end in mind, then we can proactively address the issues of accountability for the learning of all students.

Some states have completely revised their assessment systems, while others are starting from scratch in developing new parts of their assessment programs.

Kentucky created an assessment system that really includes all students. It did so by first identifying the desired results of education for all students. In this way, it started with the assumption that all students must be assessed on the same goals. At the same time, Kentucky recognized that some students needed to demonstrate their attainment of the goals in nontraditional ways.

Oregon is including students with disabilities as it develops a new component for its assessment system. It is preparing to develop a new science assessment. As it does, it is starting with the assumption that all students with disabilities are going to participate in the assessment.

Common Instructional Accommodations

Adapted Instructional Materials	Adapted Instructional Strategies
• Provide alternative assignments • Use substitute materials with lowered reading levels • Give student fewer assignments • Decrease the length of the assignment • Copy pages so student can mark on them • Give student models of correctly completed work	• Allow use of calculators • Highlight key points for student to remember • Eliminate distractions • Use checklists to guide students through experiments • Use self-monitoring sheet; reward good behavior • Break task into smaller parts to do at different times • Present information in multiple ways • Use study buddies when writing or reading is required • Secure papers to work areas with tape or magnets

Common Testing Accommodations

Presentation Format	Response Format
• Braille editions • Use of magnifying equipment • Large-print edition • Oral reading of directions • Signing of directions • Interpretation of directions	• Mark response in book • Use template for responding • Point to response • Use sign language • Use typewriter/computer
Setting	**Timing/Scheduling**
• Alone, in study carrel • With small groups • At home, with appropriate supervision/individual accountability • In special education class	• Extending time of sessions • More breaks • Extending sessions over several days

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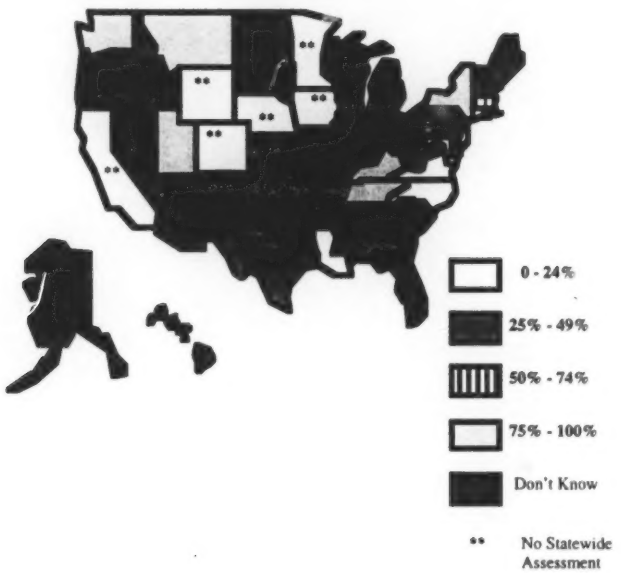
Estimated Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities in Statewide Assessments Used for School or District Accountability



Actions Steps at the State Level. Be in the know. Find out what your state is doing in the assessment arena. Does your state have a statewide assessment? If yes, find out who **participates**, how decisions are made, and secure a copy of the guidelines. Find out what, if any, **assessment accommodations** are allowed, to whom, and who makes those decisions. Secure a copy of the accommodation guidelines. Remember, having guidelines does not in itself guarantee that students with disabilities are specifically accounted for. Make sure language specifically includes students with disabilities. If your state does not have a statewide assessment find out what is currently being developed to account for student learning. In either case check to see whether students with disabilities are considered in the guidelines or the development of the assessment and policies. The following checklist outlines what guidelines and policies should allow for:

- ***Instrument Development***

  Read existing or developing guidelines to see whether students with disabilities are being included when new assessments or items are being tried out. This will help identify problems and the need for less difficult items. Assessments can be dropped, modified, or added during this development phase to allow more students with disabilities to participate.

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- *Instrument Administration*

  Check to see that students with disabilities are taking some form of the assessment. When field tests or sampling procedures are used for a new assessment, the sample must be a representative of **all** students.

- *Allow Partial Participation in an Assessment*

  Some assessments that are administered have components that can be completed by an informed respondent. Check to see whether students with disabilities are being included in this component, even if they cannot respond to other components.

  It is not uncommon for students with IEPs to be enrolled in general education content classes. For example a student may have academic strengths in the sciences and therefore participate in a science general education class. If the student is learning the content and working toward the same learning goals, the student should be included in the science portion of the assessment. Check to see whether this is an option being considered.

- *Use an Alternate Assessment for Some Students*

  Some challenge the appropriateness of including students in general assessments with IEPs focusing on life skills and functional academics. Some have posed the question "Why should my child be tested on information that is not part of her curriculum?" With this valid question in mind, we must not lose sight of the importance of including <u>all</u> students in the accountability system. It is imperative that an alternate assessment be provided for these students in order to account for their presence in the accountability system. For a small percentage of the student population sample, check to see whether there is an alternate assessment that is available or being developed in addition to the traditional assessment. These students considered for alternate assessment should be those with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Options that are currently used to obtain information on students who need a different assessment include:

Kentucky has developed a comprehensive accountability system in which all but one-half of one percent of students are assessed. Learner outcomes are measured in grades 4, 8, and 12. All students with disabilities participate, but may do so in different ways depending on the severity of their disability. One way is for the students to participate in the regular assessment components just like any other students would. A second way is for the students to participate in the assessment components with accommodations that are consistent with the instructional strategies specified in the students IEP and available to the student during classroom instruction. A third way is for the students to participate only in a separate alternate portfolio assessment. These students are those with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities.

Although Kentucky identified a percentage of 2% to activate an auditing process (if more than 2% of a school population was administered the alternate portfolio, a state department person would check into why so many students were not being given the test), this cut-off point was generous.

In actuality one-half of one percent of students in Kentucky fell into the alternate means of assessment.

Michigan has developed separate performance-based measures for students with specific disabilities. These measures assess the unique components of the education of each category of student (for example, mobility skills for students with visual impairment, use of assistive devices for students with orthopedic impairments) as well as the general requirements of the Michigan Assessment Program.

- *A Monitoring System*

It is important to build in an implementation checkpoint to monitor the adherence to the assessment guidelines. That is, no student is excluded who could participate if accommodations were used. Check to see whether a system is in place to systematically:

- Review those students who were excluded to verify that these students could not participate in the assessment with reasonable accommodations.
- Review those students included in the assessment to determine what accommodations were used.
- Remove incentives for exclusion. Some states have achieved this by assigning the lowest possible proficiency level score to all students excluded from assessments. The reporting of information on all students is a critical aspect of removing incentives for exclusion.

- *Reporting of Results*

An important component of improving the education of students is the reporting of the assessment results of **all** students, including students with disabilities. Check to see whether the State guidelines and policies indicate that results of all students are included in the final reports. If they are included, do the scores reported include those of students with disabilities or are they reported separately, or both? Find out whether the testing reports include results of those students taking alternate assessments and information gained from informed respondents. If a student is excluded from testing for any reason find out what the procedure is for scoring these exclusions. Some states assign a score of zero to excluded students, and include this in the calculation of the test results, others assign a random score. In doing so the practice of excluding students with disabilities from assessments is discouraged.

There are many ways that reporting can be instituted to overcome the pitfalls of "high stakes" assessment. For example:

- **North Carolina** assigns a random chance score to any excluded student.
- **Maryland** assigns a zero to any student who does not participate in the assessment.
- **Kentucky** assigns the scores of all students to their neighborhood schools, regardless of the school or placement they actually attend.

All of the above states include these assigned scores in the overall calculation of building, district, and state report scores.

Action Steps at the School District Level. Be in the know. Find out the philosophy and more importantly, the policies that exist for large scale assessment in your district. We know it is possible to include more students with disabilities in large scale assessments without affecting the technical characteristics of the assessment. However, to do so, a consistent set of **written guidelines** is needed. Check to see whether any exist and secure a copy. The guidelines should have a minimum of four components:

- Guidelines for **participation**
- Guidelines for **accommodation**
- Guidelines for **reporting of results**
- A **monitoring system** to ensure guidelines are being followed.

Action Steps for the IEP. Since the beginning of PL 94-142 the IEP has been the sole document mandating special education services for students with disabilities. Although the usefulness of the IEP has been questioned in the past, when it comes to the assessment of standards and results-oriented learning, the IEP is a valuable tool if meaningful questions are asked. Keeping in mind that the purpose of the IEP is to describe present program and levels of service, current levels of performance and assessment results, there is plenty of room for inquiry and documentation about the **participation** and **accommodation** of students with disabilities in the local and state level **assessment**. During the IEP process. attention needs to be given to the kinds of **instructional accommodations** being used in the classroom and the **alignment** of their use on classroom **assessment** and other **assessments.**

- Identify the type of curriculum the student is in.
- Is the student working toward the same general goals as other students? If not, why not?
- What kinds of testing modifications are indicated on the IEP? Do they make sense given the student's strengths and weaknesses, instructional skills and educational goals? Keep in mind that the most extreme test accommodation is exclusion.
- What kinds of accommodations or adaptations would increase the likelihood of participation in assessment?
- What content assessments could the student participate in with or without accommodation? Is the student capable of taking general math (or other content classes) and therefore able to participate in the math assessment?
- Is there indicated anywhere whether the student is to take part in state and national large scale assessment?

- Consider the addition of a phrase on the IEP indicating the participation of the student in assessment, with accommodations listed. It is important to align or consider the difference, if any, between accommodations allowed during classroom instruction and those provided during tests. Are they the same? If not, why not?

Some Final Words

The demand is increasing for states to implement systems of education that emphasize higher standards and accountability for all students. State assessments are being revised in response to public challenges and national initiatives. These call for a comprehensive education system that envelops all students, including those with disabilities. And, knowledge of assessment results helps policymakers make decisions about policy and program improvement. If and when we have the results of education for all students, then the policy and program improvement decisions made by educators and policymakers will take into account the full range of performance of the diverse students who attend America's schools.

Resources

A compilation of states' guidelines for accommodations in assessments for students with disabilities. A report authored by M. Thurlow, D. Scott, and J Ysseldyke (1995, Synthesis Report 18) at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

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The exclusion of students with disabilities in national data collection programs. An article authored by K. McGrew, M. Thurlow, and A. Spiegel appearing in **Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis** (1993, vol 15, pages 339-352).